News Release

New U of M Crookston Bachelor's Degree in Environmental Sciences Approved by Regents

By ltollefs on Friday, June 4, 2010

As it continues to develop and refine its portfolio of academic programs to prepare students for the vital and relevant careers of the future, the University of Minnesota, Crookston has taken another step forward. The Crookston campus gained approval to offer a bachelor of science degree in environmental sciences at the May meeting of the University of Minnesota Board of Regents, the University system's governing body. The new degree program is currently accepting students and will launch fall semester 2010.

The new program is designed to provide students with the scientific background and practical skills needed to successfully address environmental issues. It will also prepare students to be successful applicants to graduate programs. Based on their interests and career goals, students may choose from five different emphasis areas within the new degree program: agricultural environmental stewardship; environmental ecology; environmental health; environmental toxicology and chemistry; and water quality.

Graduates of the program will be trained in the basics of environmental sciences, the scientific method, and modern remediation techniques. As they enter the workforce, they will be prepared to design effective remediation plans of action, to contribute to academic or industrial research, to create new remediation technologies, and to understand the fate of new chemicals in the environment and the impact those new chemicals could have on the environment.

The environmental sciences program is a collaborative, interdisciplinary program involving the U of M, Crookston's Math, Science, and Technology Department and its Agriculture and Natural Resources Department. It also compliments and leverages strengths from the U of M, Crookston's existing bachelor's programs in biology, agronomy, horticulture, animal science, and natural resources.

Assistant Professor Katy Smith, Ph.D., a faculty member in the U of M, Crookston's Math, Science and Technology Department, led the development of the new degree program. "This is an exciting and growing field," says Smith, "and it fits well with the applied, hands-on approach to teaching and learning for which the Crookston campus is so well known."

Smith points to today's headlines involving the oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico as just one example of the type of issues environmental scientists increasingly face. "What current and new techniques will we use to help clean up after an accident like the one in the Gulf, and how can we be proactive in protecting the environment?" she asks. "Clean air and clean water--these are practical issues and they affect everyone. I know many students who are tuned in to these and other 'green' issues. It's exciting to be a part of solutions, and that is what this degree program is all about." Currently Smith is conducting research involving greenhouse gas emissions under different land management and fertility programs and in phytoremediation--the use of green plants to remove pollutants from the environment or render those pollutants harmless.

Employment opportunities regionally, statewide, and nationally for baccalaureate degree holding environmental scientists are currently good and are projected to increase through 2016 according to the U.S. Department of Labor's Bureau of Labor Statistics. At the national level, there is a projected increase of 25 percent for entry-level positions for environmental sciences professionals in the coming decade.

A recent report from the Bureau states that increases in employment in this field are being driven by "increasing demands placed on the environment and water resources by population growth." Further, the report states that "demand should result from the need to comply with complex environmental laws and regulations, particularly those regarding ground-water decontamination, clean air, and flood control." Much of the job growth in this area is predicted to result from a need to monitor the environment "to interpret the impact of human actions on terrestrial and aquatic ecosystems, and to develop strategies for restoring ecosystems," according to the Bureau.

At the May meeting, the Board of Regents also approved the U of M, Crookston's proposal to offer minors in environmental sciences and in chemistry.

To learn more about the new degree program in environmental sciences visit www.umcrookston.edu/academics.

Today the University of Minnesota, Crookston delivers more than 25 bachelor's degree programs and 50 concentrations, including several online degrees, in agriculture and natural resources; arts, humanities and social sciences; business; and math, science and technology. With an enrollment of about 1,300 undergraduates, the Crookston campus offers a supportive, close-knit atmosphere that leads to a prestigious University of Minnesota degree. "Small Campus. Big Degree." To learn more, visit www.umcrookston.edu.

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2900 University Ave., Crookston, MN 56716
800-862-6466 | 218-281-6510 | umcinfo@umn.edu